

KEY WEST CITIZEN, Big ship group reviews year of cruise study, BY TIMOTHY O'HARA

KEY WEST -- Key West has become a major port of call for cruise ships, with as many as four ships in town on certain days. However, the industry's future in the small island town is not cast in stone, as the community continues to debate the environmental impacts and economic benefits.

The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary's Large Vessel Working Group has spent more than a year analyzing the impact of cruise ships and Navy vessels on the reef and nearshore waters. The group will hold its last meeting at 1 p.m. Monday at the Harvey Government Center in Key West.

The panel, made up of Keys captains, commercial fishermen, port directors and research scientists, will review what they learned during the previous four meetings and decide on recommendations to the full Sanctuary Advisory Council on Feb. 17. The discussion will include regulatory issues, turbidity, sedimentation, discharges and emissions and port operations.

The working group has provided Keys residents and Sanctuary Advisory Council members a format to bring in experts to talk about the environmental impacts of large vessels. The meetings have also been a forum for the public to learn more about the upcoming Navy-dredging plan for the Outer Mole Pier channel.

"There was a lot of information being passed around, some accurate and some not so accurate," working group co-chairwoman Nancy Klingener said. "This has provided a forum to discuss the information and listen to people who are the experts in the field."

Klingener and co-chairman Capt. Don Kincaid could not yet say what the group plans to recommend to the Sanctuary Advisory Council. Kincaid said he hopes that the Keys advisory council will adopt similar regulations to that of the Monterey Bay, Calif., council, which has set up guidelines on big ships, fishing and even water scooters. Kincaid believes the cruise industry needs to modify its environmental and labor policies, which he says are woefully out of date.

Reef Relief Executive Director DeeVon Quirolo, public works Director David Fernandez and Port Director Raymond Archer will discuss Key West's efforts to expand the no-discharge zone to cruise ships. And city officials will talk about efforts to require pump-outs for the ships.